

In the Claims:

Cancel claims 36, 45, 51-53, 55-63 and 65-71 without estoppel or disclaimer of the subject matter thereof, and amend claims 54, 64 as follows:

1-33. (Canceled).

34. (Previously Presented) A tissue dissector, comprising:

an elongated cannula having a proximal end and a distal end;

a distal tip having tapered outer walls converging to a blunt end for dissecting tissue, the tip being disposed on the distal end of the cannula to dissect tissue and facilitate passage of the cannula through tissue;

a length of screw threads positioned on an outer surface of the cannula proximal to the distal tip; and

a dilating element disposed on the cannula proximal to the distal tip, the dilating element having a smooth exterior contour to facilitate atraumatic expansion of tissue following dissection by the tapered distal tip, the dilating element having a cross-sectional dimension greater than the cross-sectional dimension of the distal end of the cannula and greater than the cross-sectional dimension of the distal tip, the dilating element further comprising a threaded bore hold formed in the dilating element for engaging the length of screw threads on the cannula for removably positioning the dilating element on the cannula.

35. (Previously presented) The tissue dissector of claim 34, where in the dilating element is solid.

36. (Cancelled)

37. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 34, further including an endoscope sized to fit within a lumen of the cannula, wherein the distal tip is transparent to allow tissue being dissected to be visualized with the endoscope through the distal tip.

38. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 34, further including a spacer length of cannula of between 14-28 mm disposed between a distal end of the dilating element and a proximal end of the distal tip.

39. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 34, wherein the cross-sectional dimension of the dilating element is at least two times larger than the cross-section sectional dimension of the distal end of the cannula.

40. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 39, wherein the cross-sectional dimension of the dilating element is between 15-30 mm.

41. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 34, wherein the exterior contour of the dilating element is an oval-shape.

42. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 34, wherein the dilating element is compressible.

43. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector kit, comprising:
an elongated cannula having a proximal end and a distal end;

a distal tip having tapered outer walls converging to a blunt end for dissecting tissue, the tip being disposed on the distal end of the cannula to dissect tissue and facilitate passage of the cannula through tissue;

a locking mechanism positioned on the cannula proximal to the distal tip; and

a plurality of dilating elements each adapted to mount on the cannula proximal to the distal tip, each dilating element having a smooth exterior contour to facilitate atraumatic expansion of tissue following dissection by the tapered distal tip, each dilating element having a cross-sectional dimension greater than the cross-sectional dimension of the distal tip, the cross-section sectional dimension of each dilating element being different from one another, each dilating element further comprising a mating lock adapted to mate with the locking mechanism on the cannula for removably positioning each dilating element on the cannula,

wherein different dilating elements may be mounted one at a time on the cannula for dissecting tissue and therefore forming cavities of differing dimensions.

44. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 43, wherein the locking mechanism comprises a length of screw threads positioned on an outer surface of the cannula, and the mating lock comprises a threaded bore hole formed in each dilating element for engaging the length of screw threads.

45. (Cancelled)

46. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 43, further including an endoscope sized to fit within a lumen of the cannula, wherein the distal tip is transparent to allow tissue being dissected to be visualized with the endoscope through the distal tip.

47. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 43, further including a spacer length of cannula of between 14-28 mm disposed between a distal end of each mounted dilating element and a proximal end of the distal tip.

48. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 43, wherein the cross-sectional dimension of each dilating element is at least two times larger than the cross-section sectional dimension of the distal end of the cannula.

49. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 48, wherein the cross-sectional dimension of each dilating element is between 15-30 mm.

50. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 43, wherein the exterior contour of each dilating element is an oval-shape.

51-53. (Cancelled)

54. (Currently amended) A The tissue dissector of claim 53, comprising:
an elongated cannula having a proximal end and a distal end;
a distal tip having tapered outer walls converging to a blunt end
for dissecting tissue, the tip being disposed on the distal end of the

cannula to dissect tissue and facilitate passage of the cannula through tissue; and

a solid dilating element of fixed outer dimension removably mounted on the cannula proximal to the distal tip, the dilating element having a smooth exterior contour to facilitate atraumatic expansion of tissue following dissection by the tapered distal tip, the dilating element having a cross-sectional dimension greater than the cross-sectional dimension of the distal end of the cannula and greater than the cross-sectional dimension of the distal tip, the cannula further including a length of screw threads positioned on an outer surface of the cannula proximal to the distal tip, and wherein the dilating element further comprises a threaded bore hole for engaging the length of screw threads and removably positioning the dilating element on the cannula.

55-63. (Cancelled)

64. (Currently amended) A The tissue dissector of claim 63, comprising: an elongated cannula having a proximal end and a distal end; and a dilating unit removably mounted on the cannula distal end, including:

a distal tip having tapered outer walls converging to a blunt end for dissecting tissue, the tip being disposed on the distal end of the

dilating unit to dissect tissue and facilitate passage of the cannula through tissue; and

a dilating element having a cross-sectional dimension greater than the cross-sectional dimension of the distal tip end of the cannula and greater than the cross-sectional dimension of the distal tip, the dilating element being located proximally with respect to the distal tip to facilitate expansion of tissue following dissection by the tapered distal tip, the cannula further including a length of screw threads positioned on an outer surface of the cannula near the distal end thereof, and wherein the dilating unit further comprises a threaded bore hole for engaging the length of screw threads and mounting the dilating unit on the distal end of the cannula.

65.-71. (Cancelled)